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# Older eyes on Lasik

## Procedural improvements erase past skepticism, local surgeons say

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Dr. Gary A. Varley performs laser eye surgery on a patient at the Cincinnati Eye Institute. / Provided

Written by  
**Shauna Steigerwald**

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Tired of wearing glasses or contacts to help them see clearly, more and more people are turning to laser vision correction for a more permanent fix. For patients middle aged and older in particular, the surgery is becoming increasingly popular.

“It’s definitely been a trend,” said Dr. Vincent Marino, D.O. at LasikPlus in Kenwood. “We’ve been doing laser vision correction at LasikPlus since 1995; early on, we were typically seeing younger people as a general trend. As time has passed, we are definitely seeing more of a trend of people in their 40s and 50s, and even

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60s.”

Contributing to the increase in popularity among that demographic is an increase in acceptance of the surgery among the general population, according to Dr. Gary Varley, medical director at Cincinnati Eye Institute in Blue Ash.

### Laser eye surgery: A primer from Dr. Gary Varley

- Procedure: Laser vision correction is done via two main procedures: photorefractive keratectomy (PRK) and LASIK. “Both use a laser to refocus the eye by changing the shape of the cornea, the clear membrane you see through when you look at the iris or pupil of the eye; it’s what a contact would rest on.” Most surgeries, about 90 percent, are Lasik, he said.
- Age: The minimum age is 18 and a stable refraction, meaning glasses prescription isn’t getting worse year by year. That typically happens between 16 and 24, he said. There’s no maximum age if eyes are healthy, free of diseases and cataracts, and the patient is otherwise a good candidate.
- Outcome: In Dr. Varley’s experience, in about 96 percent of eyes, vision is 20-20 or better after surgery; in 50-60 percent of those, it’s even better.
- Risks: “There are some significant risks, but in good hands, those risks are incredibly low,” he said. Moreover, surgery is a one-time risk, he pointed out. “There is some new data that is supportive that it’s less risky than wearing contact lenses. The risk with Lasik is a one-time risk of infection or other adverse event. Every time you put a contact lens in your eye, you’re at risk for infection.”

### Here comes the bride, the groom, the graduate

Laser eye surgery is also becoming more popular among younger people marking life milestones: brides- and grooms-to-be, as well as recent graduates.

“It’s kind of a phenomenon, actually,” Lasik *Plus* surgeon Dr. Vincent Marino said of engaged patients getting the surgery.

“They know that marriage is a life-changing process and they’re getting ready for it; it’s something that, as they go through their wedding day, their honeymoon and raising a family after marriage, laser vision correction can be a benefit,” in that they no longer have the hassle of glasses or contacts, he said.

“Lasik is now a well known, fairly well understood procedure,” he said. “Ten years ago, patients would still say ‘That’s too new’ or ‘I don’t know anything about it.’”

And as they get older, patients are more likely to be able to afford the procedure, the average cost of which is about \$2,100 per eye, he said. Plus, vision correction can become more and more of a hassle as we age.

“When they get over 40, now they need reading glasses,” Dr. Varley said. “If they have contacts, they have to get reading glasses; if they have glasses, they have to get bifocals.”

Unfortunately, laser surgery won’t mean leaving those reading glasses behind: Although it can correct farsightedness, nearsightedness and astigmatism, Lasik can’t fix presbyopia, the age-related loss of focusing that necessitates them.

Instead, Dr. Marino said patients can get the surgery to correct their eyes for distance and continue to use reading glasses, or they can try monovision correction, which is also becoming more and more popular.

“In one of the eyes, we correct them for distance; in the opposite eye, we leave them a little bit nearsighted, so they can use that eye for reading,” Dr. Marino said. “For individuals wearing monovision contacts, we can mimic that quite well.”

Having the surgery at an older age doesn’t pose additional risks, Dr. Marino said.

“Someone over 40, it’s just as possible for them to get a good outcome as it is for a younger person,” he said. About 75 percent



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At Cincinnati Eye Institute, Dr. Gary Varley performed the surgery on one such bride, Amanda Brown of Delhi Township, last Friday.

"We're going to have a destination wedding on the beach. The thought of having to wear glasses or not being able to see just wasn't an option," said Brown.

After wearing glasses off and on since junior high, and full-time for the last six or seven years, Brown, 30, said her wedding was "the push" to go forward with surgery.

"Being able to see right away, it's fantastic," she said.

Dr. Marino noted that the surgery is also becoming a popular present for graduates. "It's the new watch," he said.

Shauna Steigerwald

of patients make good surgery candidates, he said.

What factors make someone a good or bad candidate? Dr. Varley lists the following:

- Degree of focusing error: The bigger the abnormality or the thicker the glasses, in general, the harder it is to get your vision as perfect as you want.
- General eye health (must be free of glaucoma, macular degeneration, cataracts and severe dry eye), shape of the cornea and size of pupils.
- The personality of the patient: "If you have a type A personality that (believes)

everything is black and white, they may not be as happy with the outcome as someone who's more easygoing and accepting," he said.

General eye health can limit on older patients who want surgery, as they're more likely to develop those diseases, Dr. Varley said.

For all patients, Dr. Varley recommends that they choose a surgeon and a center that makes them feel comfortable, and make sure their surgeon understands their goals.

"You can't take LASIK back and say that it doesn't work," he added.

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